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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Endeavour Forum and JMJ Children's Fund of Canada, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61854 (E) 100112

Please recycle

Statement

JMJ Children's Fund of Canada (JMJ) and Endeavour Forum support the themes of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women which address issues related to rural women, empowerment, poverty reduction and development. JMJ believes that it is a holistic approach that deals with both sound mind and healthy body that is most beneficial to the development of women in developing nations.

JMJ has been educating girls in the rural areas of Ghana, Haiti, India, Malawi and Uganda for several years. JMJ starts with very young children. For example, in Zambia, JMJ has helped to develop a preschool facility. In some parts of Ghana, this type of preschool preparation is required before children are allowed to begin formal schooling. Some of those children are in great need. Many have parents who have died of AIDS, and are being raised by extended family whose first priority is looking after their own children. Some belong to families that need help with supervision because both parents work. Many are being raised by single mothers.

While supporting day care and early child development, JMJ also provides nutrition not only to the children being directly assisted but also to their families, as some food is inevitably taken home. In addition, the health of those children is being monitored in medical clinics at the day care centres. For example, through the treatment of the early symptoms of malaria, time lost as a result of school absences is reduced. JMJ is therefore helping to heal and educate mind and body, and it is this holistic approach for which both JMJ and Endeavour Forum advocate. When day care of this type is not provided, older children end up looking after the younger ones, and all of them are deprived of a normal childhood. It is for this same reason that Endeavour Forum promotes breastfeeding, which aids speech and brain development in the infant and reduces the risk of breast cancer in the mother.

A concrete example is Elizabeth, a young woman who has become JMJ's first university graduate. First sponsored as a young child in 1999, Elizabeth went on to Cape Coast University in Ghana — one of two women in her class in the faculty of mathematics. She graduated in 2010.

JMJ defines the development of women as not involving education alone or health care alone but as a whole perspective that deals with the entire person, providing the atmosphere for studying and the nutritional component, as well as meeting medical needs. All of the JMJ projects (Ghana, Haiti, India, Uganda and Zambia) have these components to support the development of women in poorer regions of the world.

In each of the strategic themes of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, JMJ realizes that a holistic approach to the development of children — physically, mentally, emotionally, intellectually and socially — is the key to the development of peoples and, ultimately, the development of women.

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Statement submitted by the Federation of Cuban Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Please recycle

Statement

The Federation of Cuban Women, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in special consultative status since 1997 with over 4 million members, wishes to make the following statement on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.

The world is faced with social inequality, growing class differences, increasingly powerful multinationals, wars, militarization, exploitation of human beings and of nature and a trend towards authoritarianism.

Cuban women, who live in this tumultuous world, are witnesses to the fact that patriarchal, predatory capitalism has dragged the world into a deep, multifaceted crisis. Natural and energy resources have been plundered, especially in the South, climate collapse is imminent, and the food crisis will have devastating consequences, including hunger, poverty and migration.

In the third world, resources have been plundered, populations have been harassed, and leaders have been forcibly changed by imperial fiat, as national sovereignty has been trampled underfoot with absolute impunity. Men and women around the world hope that the recent reform process in the United Nations will prove to be an effective mechanism for protecting them against these great calamities.

The situation in Cuba is different, although the country's economy has also been hit by the multifaceted crisis, in addition to the cruel and genocidal blockade which has been condemned 20 times, by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly. In spite of this, the United States of America has not changed its policies.

Human well-being can only be attained through full and comprehensive development in many different areas. It must be the focus of all programmes and policies. This is the goal, above and beyond any international agreements that might be signed by the country; moreover, it is the basis for all national plans and programmes.

Bearing in mind the basic principle that priority must be given to producing food for the people, in line with Decree-Law No. 259 of 2008, a new form of land distribution and production has been launched. This entails granting usufruct in order to strengthen productivity and promote employment for women and men. More than 12,000 women have been granted possession of land, along with full access to credit, technical assistance and other opportunities. This enables women to manage and have greater control over land and resources and to apply sound environmental principles.

A total of 223,592 women are currently working in agriculture. Of these, 108,104 work in agricultural enterprises, 106,209 on production units, and 2,063 in the agricultural sciences; of the latter, 253 are scientists.

In the sugar sector, 22 per cent of the workforce are women, and 590, or 9 per cent, hold management positions. Of these, five are directors in the central agency, 70 are directors in functional positions, 44 are vice-directors, and 41 are company directors; of the latter, nine are directors of agro-industrial complexes, and one is director of an entrepreneurial group.

The number of women serving as leaders of the National Association of Small Farmers has tripled to a total of 307, representing 33 per cent of the professional staff at all levels. Of these, 88 are presidents of credit and service cooperatives, 51 work in agricultural production, 21 are municipal chairpersons of the Association, 212 are members of the secretariats, 22 are in the provincial secretariats, and three in the national bureau.

The needs of rural women, like those of the rest of the population, are fully met. The fundamental right to life is assured by the Government from the moment human life begins. In the mountainous areas (nine provinces are in the mountains), a special programme is under way to improve the quality of life, especially for women, with priority being given to basic services in health, education and food. There is also a cultural programme which provides for the construction of video and television rooms, as well as the supply of television sets, video equipment and computers in every school. This helps raise awareness among the population in the areas of environmental conservation, risk reduction and mitigation of the inevitable effects of climate change. At present, 1,800 television and video rooms are available in rural areas where the people can spend leisure time and receive training in subjects such as economics and gender issues. Many of these facilities operate with solar cells and provide jobs for women.

In spite of the serious drought that has hit the country, more than 2,000 water-supply systems have been installed to supply rural areas with chlorinated drinking water. The use of ceramic filters to improve water quality was increased. This has benefited more than 3,000 rural communities, providing them services that are comparable in quality with those of the urban areas.

The State has made a special effort to guarantee the supply of electric power, which is currently provided to nearly 99 per cent of all housing units. In addition to the national power-generation network, different sources of energy are used. Hydroelectric plants supply approximately 10,000 households, and diesel plants supply some 30,000 dwellings in remote areas. Sugar-production plants produce electricity for over 30,000 housing units in *bateyes* (sugar workers' towns).

In non-agricultural sectors, rural women work in different departments of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, as well as in warehouses, beauty parlours, schools, post offices, worker lunchrooms, doctors' offices and hospitals, and in sewage systems, where thousands of women operate new technologies.

To meet the country's needs in the area of reforestation, and in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Federation of Cuban Women, a campaign called "50 árboles más ..." (50 more trees) was launched with the participation of women. The campaign has enlisted the support of families in planting fruit trees and trees for timber. Different communities have planted more than 135 forests, developed 1,348 nurseries and carried out other initiatives, such as collecting seeds and encouraging people to plant their own gardens.

The Federation of Cuban Women interacts with a number of agencies and organizations in order to promote and develop policies on behalf of women:

- Since 1992, the Red Cubana de Organismos e Instituciones de Apoyo a la Mujer Rural (Cuban network of agencies and institutions working on behalf of rural women), a regional initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of

the United Nations has monitored policies and compliance with regulations and other measures designed to improve the status of women. The network has also been actively involved in the organization of yearly events held in celebration of Rural Women's Day and World Food Day.

- The Federation of Cuban Women and the National Association of Small Farmers carry out joint actions to provide services for rural families, providing assistance for older persons by helping them strengthen their personal relationships, facilitating recreational opportunities and promoting recognition of their contribution to society. In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Federation of Cuban Women, these organizations promoted a nationwide campaign called "23 por el 23" (23 for the 23rd), with the goal of encouraging at least 23 women to join each of the more than 3,500 cooperatives in the country.

- A book was published with the testimonies of 50 women rural leaders.

- The gender strategy implemented by the National Association of Small Farmers provides for the creation of the National Commission on Gender, as well as gender commissions at all levels of leadership. It also provides for the establishment of a gender programme to provide training on the subject for leaders of the organization.

- The Cuban Livestock Producers Association, which is headed by a woman and has about 20,000 members, is applying a gender strategy at all levels of the organization. The Association awards a prize to rural women who work in the scientific, technical and practical areas of agri-food production.

The Federation of Cuban Women supports rural women, who have a high profile in Cuba, unlike the situation in other parts of the world. This is made possible by political will of the State and the Government, and the social goals we pursue.

For the well-being of all rural women in Latin America and the world, Cuban women call for the construction, from the grass roots up, of a new international economic and social order that is just and equitable, in which the contributions of women in the development of present and future generations are duly recognized.

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Statement submitted by International Council of Psychologists, International Council of Women, International Federation for Home Economics, Make Mothers Matter International, National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National Council of Women of the United States, Universal Peace Federation and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61644 (E) 121211

Please recycle

Statement

We are deeply committed to the theme of this year's Commission on the Status of Women, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication". As at 1 November 2011, the world's population had reached 7 billion. The United Nations Population Fund forecasts continuation of population increases in the years to come. The importance of ensuring the success of rural women in their role in the eradication of poverty and hunger is explicit. Factors that prevail currently should also be considered when examining the importance of their roles in these two tasks. The migration from rural communities to urban settings in search of employment, global temperature shifts, the global recession, war and famine spreading throughout the world add further importance to their roles and increase the urgency of providing them with adequate support to maintain the goal of eradicating poverty and hunger.

Progress has been made in the awareness and attention given to the empowerment of women and achievement of human rights for women and girls since the world conferences which began in Mexico in 1975. Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls on Governments to eliminate discrimination against rural women. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, though not a binding document, continues to serve as a guide on many issues related to woman's human rights. It specifically highlights the need for policies and strategies to improve the situation of rural women producers in the areas of incomes and household food security. Continued support and emphasis need to be placed in order to ensure implementation of these policies and goals, particularly in countries where women are more and more being forced into a role of the household head.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by the target date established by the Millennium Declaration would be a significant step towards the empowerment of women. However, despite very positive legislation over the years, the actual plight of rural women of all ages continues to present many problems that need to be addressed. Despite variation in degrees of severity, serious problems face rural women in developed countries, developing countries and countries in transition to a market economy. Such problems include lack of access to resources, land, financing, technologies, education, training, physical and mental health services and markets, and lack of social protection measures and inheritance rights.

Currently rural women are experiencing a crisis due to the decline of rural communities caused by high unemployment rates, low wages, unpaid work, movement of rural population to cities, lack of services, lack of adequate roads and transportation, lack of technology, lack of equipment, lack of adequate and accessible health care and lack of adequate education. For example, even in countries such as Ukraine with rich soil, villages are declining and the burden frequently falls on older women. Out of 329,000 rural settlements, almost 9,000 are declining and dying. In 3,000 settlements, no children were born. Nine per cent of settlements have no children under 5 years of age. Africa and other developing regions experience an extreme lack of resources, high rates of extreme poverty and lack of human rights for rural women, exacerbated by the AIDS epidemic and climate change.

Rural areas have maintained traditional patterns of behaviour as change reaches villages more slowly. Rural women are often subservient to men and follow patriarchal normative patterns. They carry a disproportionate share of caregiving for children, the disabled and the elderly. The Secretary-General, in his statement on World Rural Women's Day, writes: "Study after study has demonstrated that rural women are pivotal to addressing hunger, malnutrition and poverty. They are the farmers and nurturers, the entrepreneurs and educators, the healers and helpers who can contribute to food security and economic growth in the world's most remote and vulnerable settings."

In view of the importance of rural women's contribution and especially in view of globalization, the economic and ecological crises as well as the crisis caused by natural disasters, we urge Governments to take immediate action in order to stop and prevent the extinction of rural communities and the massive flight of populations to urban areas, thus endangering the world's food supply and bringing about hunger and starvation.

We urge Governments to:

- Provide adequate funding in their budgets for the empowerment of rural women and rural development
- Support rural women's active participation and consultation on policies for rural well-being and development
- Address rural women's unpaid work
- Facilitate provision of resources and social protection measures
- Improve infrastructure — access to drinkable water, roads, sanitation, cooking and heating resources
- Facilitate creation of local credit unions
- Provide access to education and training
- Provide access to technology
- Facilitate access to information and communications technology
- Support non-governmental rural women's organizations in leading educational campaigns on women's empowerment and women's human rights
- Improve data collection disaggregated by sex and age and rural and urban populations for use in rural policy formulation
- Prevent climate change by developing new sources of energy and elimination of harmful emissions
- Develop a global partnership in accordance with Millennium Development Goal 8 for rural development and food security based on an open, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory trading and financial system.

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Statement submitted by International Council of Women and International Federation of Business and Professional Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61650 (E) 161211

Please recycle

Statement

The organizations members of Project Five-O: The International Federation of Business and Professional Women (known worldwide as Business and Professional Women International) and the International Council of Women hold consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and fully support the empowerment of rural women. Without empowerment and equality, the role of rural women cannot be fully realized in overcoming the challenges of everyday life and enjoying rights which are fundamental to good physical and mental health and general well-being and not being doomed to a life of poverty. These include the rights to:

(a) Ownership of property, including land;

(b) Ready access to clean, fresh drinking water for domestic use and good-quality water for crops;

(c) Appropriate housing away from soil and air pollution;

(d) Education and training;

(e) Sound financial advice and credit;

(f) Live in peace free from all forms of discrimination and violence.

Governments and institutions everywhere should work to ensure that rural women enjoy these rights and are part of the decision-making that affects their livelihoods. They need — in fact, they have the right — to sit on Boards where policy is developed and implementation overseen in, e.g., agriculture, aquaculture, forestry and the marketing of produce. Rural women play a large part in the food chain and in ensuring food security.

Rural women also face other challenges beyond their control, such as climate change, which affects crops and animal husbandry; diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and malaria; natural disasters; civil strife; and the current global financial uncertainty, all of which ultimately affect food security. Women suffer more than men from the effects of these challenges and are more likely than they to live in poverty.

Sustainable development projects, such as those carried out by Project Five-O and smaller ones run by the International Council of Women, assist in ensuring that the valuable contribution that women make not only to their communities, but to society as a whole, are recognized. For many, such projects lead to the setting-up of business enterprises based on food production or traditional crafts.

Working through its affiliated councils and representatives at the United Nations in helping rural women to overcome the challenges that they face, the Council is mindful of the various relevant United Nations conventions, declarations and action plans, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Agenda 21, United Nations Environment Programme declarations, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. The Council urges Governments not only to sign these instruments, but also to ensure that they are acted upon and become part of Government policy, with particular reference to reporting obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Council also notes the International Fund for Agricultural Development publication *Rural Poverty Report 2011*.

The challenges and needs of rural women are not dissimilar to those of urban women. The Council and Business and Professional Women International work tirelessly to improve the status and general well-being of all women and girls, particularly the marginalized, many of whom come from rural areas. The Council has conducted workshops and seminars focusing on climate change, the environment and food security, with the eradication of poverty as an underlying theme. One such seminar, held by the Asia Pacific Regional Council as recently as November 2011, focused on sustainable development, looking at women in the areas of agriculture, food security and health.

Rural women and the economy

Women play an important role in driving agriculture-led growth worldwide. Agriculture is a powerful engine for development, and, in several Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies, women constitute nearly half of the agricultural labour force. Women in developed and developing countries all carry disproportionate domestic responsibilities, but where attitudes towards women are more traditional — in particular in the rural areas of the least developed countries — the inequality of the work burden is at its highest, in terms of both domestic and agricultural workforce labour.

At the APEC summit on women and the economy, held in San Francisco, the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Hillary Rodham Clinton, stated: "Women farmers are up to 30 per cent less productive than male farmers, and that's not because they are working less or are less committed. It's because women farmers have access to fewer resources. They have less fertilizer, fewer tools, poorer-quality seeds and less access to training or to land. And they have much less time to farm because they also have to do most of the household work. When that resource gap is closed and resources are allocated equally — and, better yet, efficiently — women and men are equally productive in agriculture. And that has positive benefits. In Nepal, for example, where mothers have greater ownership of land because of their inheritance rights, there are fewer severely underweight children."

In developing economies, women's contributions could be much greater if they had equal access to essential economic resources and services, such as land, credit and training. Of particular importance is the legal enshrinement of these rights, it having been noted that women own less than 2 per cent of the world's private land and that, when their enterprises become successful, they are prone to being taken over by men. Business and Professional Women International is of the view that without legislation-based access to and protection of resources, economic improvement cannot be sustained.

In European Union countries, the number of people who are working either full-time or part-time in agriculture was 13.7 million in 2000; 12.2 million of them are the family workforce, and 38 per cent of them are women. Women working for companies in the agricultural sector make up the highest percentage in Italy, at 34 per cent. In Spain and Greece, this figure is 13 per cent, and in Portugal and France it is 9 per cent. In Asia and Africa, studies have shown that women work as many as 13 hours more per week than men. A study conducted in Africa found that on average, over the course of a year, women carried more than 80 tons of fuel, water and farm produce for a distance of 1 kilometre; men carried only one eighth

as much, or an average of 10 tons, for 1 kilometre. All this is evidence of the need to recognize the centrality of women to food security worldwide, and the need to unleash their economic potential.

Access to resources

Project Five-O, through its advocacy for the joint initiative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Global Compact entitled "Women's empowerment principles: equality means business", supports the central role played by the initiative in opening up opportunities for women in the supply chain and the value chain.

The inaugural meeting of the International Trade Centre's Global Platform for Action on Sourcing from Women Vendors, held in Chongqing, China, was aimed at increasing the share of corporate, Government and institutional procurement secured by women vendors for the ultimate purpose of bringing greater economic benefit to women and their communities. As a result of bringing down the barriers for women in smaller or less-developed enterprises, they are able to reach the point of gaining access to larger supply contracts. Already, the platform has seen significant benefits for women in agriculture.

Project Five-O advocates training opportunities that can fit women vendors and women in the value chain across the enterprise development continuum. Despite progress made in national and international policies since the holding of the United Nations World Conference on Women in 1975, urgent action is necessary to ensure gender and social equity in agricultural knowledge, science and technology policies and practices. Such action includes strengthening the capacity of public institutions and non-governmental organizations to improve their knowledge of women's changing forms of involvement in farming and other economic activities. It requires placing priority on women's access to education, information, science and technology, and extension services to allow for the improvement of women's access, ownership and control of economic and natural resources. To ensure such access, ownership and control legal measures, appropriate credit schemes, support for women's income-generating activities and the reinforcement of women's organizations and networks are needed.

Closing the gender gap

The evidence set out above is supported by the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report*, which finds a direct correlation between the gender gap and economic productivity: the lower the gender gap, the higher the productivity. As Klaus Schwab, Executive Chair of the Forum, concludes, "Women and girls must be treated equally if a country is to grow and prosper". Discriminatory attitudes towards women, more strongly held in traditional rural communities, hamper economic and social development. There is now an urgent need to remove discriminatory attitudes that continue to inhibit women's participation in the economy. Only once that has been accomplished will we see the opportunity to accelerate growth in developing economies while, at the same time, producing more and cheaper food for our planet. Harnessing the economic potential of women will bring about a new and better future.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, if the resource gap that is clearly holding women back in developing economies were

closed, we could feed 150 million more people worldwide every year, and that is in addition to the higher incomes for families, the more efficient markets and the more agricultural trade that would result. In order to realize their potential as workers, entrepreneurs and business leaders, women need enabling environments to elevate the economic performance of communities, nations and the world.